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SUBJECT: Genghis Khan Makes A Comeback

Refs: (A) Ulaanbaatar 381, (B) 05 Ulaanbaatar 601, (C)  
05 Ulaanbaatar 436

11. Earlier this week, Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan) replaced the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP). The MPRP, the social democratic descendant of the Communist Party which ruled Mongolia for nearly seven decades, is the dominant party in the coalition government formed in January. Akin to Los Angeles' trademark "Hollywood" sign, the Cyrillic abbreviation of the MPRP long has been emblazoned in white rocks on the hills just south of Ulaanbaatar, a highly visible emblem of the party's strength and influence. No more. In the place of "MPRP," a huge portrait of Chinggis Khaan now gazes northward over the capital.

800th Anniversary a Boon to Rebirth  
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12. Genghis has had a good year, his presence expanding as Mongolia prepares for a summer of celebrations to mark the 800th anniversary of his establishment of the Mongolian state in 1206 (refs a and b). In December, he made a nominal conquest with the conversion of the capital's "Buyant-Ukhaa Airport" to the "Chinggis Khaan International Airport." Last August (ref c), a planned memorial for him in central Ulaanbaatar required the secretive, wee hours relocation of the remains of

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Sukhbaatar (the short-lived hero of the 1921 independence resolution) and Choibalsan (the Stalinist era dictator who killed many, but who enjoys a mixed legacy, being credited with preventing Mongolia from being subsumed into the Soviet Union). In place of their joint mausoleum, the massive new Chinggis Khaan memorial complex will stand between Sukhbaatar Square and Government House, the block square structure containing Mongolia's legislature and the offices of the President and Prime Minister.

Poor Planning Slows Khan's Memorial  
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13. Unfortunately, the Chinggis Khaan memorial will not be ready for this summer, the consequence of being

started too late and with a woefully inadequate initial budget. The State Great Hural (parliament) just approved a supplemental allocation for it and other anniversary-related expenses. However, there are less than four weeks to go before Naadam, the July 11-13 holiday which is a combination of national day and the Mongolian-style Olympics (those being the "manly" sports of horseracing, archery, and wrestling). The memorial structure presently is roofless, the 64 massive five-storey tall concrete columns only now beginning to be clad with stone. Authorities have dropped statements of only a few weeks ago that the exterior of the structure would be complete by Naadam and the interior by November. Leaders grumble about inadequate planning by "the previous government" (in which the MPRP was a full partner before deposing it).

#### Communists Were Uncomfortable With Chinggis Khaan

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¶4. Since Mongolia's democratic revolution in 1990, Chinggis Khaan has emerged as a potent symbol of national pride and Mongolia's former world-shaking power, and as a unifying figure above the economic difficulties and petty politics of the current day. The public adulation marks a great change. One year after Mongolia was admitted to the United Nations in 1961, Mongolia's 2nd ranking Communist leader authorized a stamp series, small monument, and historical seminar to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the great khan's birth. The Soviet Union reacted with fury; Russians did not have fond memories of the Mongol empire, and saw any positive reference to Chinggis Khaan as a dangerous sign of Mongolian

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nationalism. The contrite MPRP deposed the leader and exiled him internally. He was later hacked to death with an axe. Scholars of Mongolian history were imprisoned and some secretly executed. Years later, the MPRP surrender of the capital's commanding heights to Chinggis Khaan seems to validate the Soviet fears in ¶1962.

#### Historical Struggle: What Chinese Dynasty?

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¶5. Struggles over history have not completely vanished. Two weeks ago, President Enkhbayar told the Ambassador that there is an active debate over whether to carry out the original plan to place a statue of Khubilai Khan outside the memorial structure (which will have a huge central statue of Chinggis Khaan, and on one side a statue of Ogodei Khan, who ruled the Mongolian empire from 1229-1241). The problem with Khubilai Khan, Enkhbayar said, is the link to Chinese history: Khubilai Khan, who ruled the Mongolian empire from 1260-1294, also founded China's Yuan dynasty in ¶1279. While proud of Khubilai Khan's conquest of their much larger neighbor, democratic Mongolia has sometimes urged Chinese scholars to retroactively remove the Yuan from their list of dynasties, the better to underline Mongolia's utter separation from the Middle Kingdom. The Yuan dynasty ended in 1368 and the Mongolians were expelled. In the 1700s, one side in an internal Mongolian struggle invited the Chinese in, and it took Russian help to help finally end Chinese rule in 1921. Looking past the Stalinist era purges and effective Russian colonial rule in the world's second Communist state, Mongolians today remain grateful to the Russians and wary of the Chinese. In surveys, 54% describe Russia as Mongolia's best partner, as compared to 15% for China (and 44% for the United States).

#### Genghis Brand All-Conquering

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¶6. Chinggis Khaan's status, however, contains no such grey areas, and the new portrait gazing benevolently over Ulaanbaatar is not necessarily the end of the matter. The 800th anniversary organizing committee proposed to change the capital's name (a Communist era creation meaning "Red Hero") to "Chinggis City." The national anthem is being revised for the anniversary, and we would not be surprised to see the Great Khan's name crop up in the new lyrics. Foreign territory is not immune: last year, Ambassador Bold urged Washington, DC to make space for a Chinggis Khaan monument in some corner of the city unoccupied by America's own legendary figures. Our own commemorative embassy coin bears the State Department seal on one side and the same portrait of Genghis Khan on the reverse as now gazes down on the capital (the portrait was done years after his death by a court painter during the Yuan Dynasty, with the result he looks more like a benevolent Chinese ruler than a hardy nomadic conqueror). Still, some in Mongolia's legislature have grown disturbed by the commercial use of Genghis Khan's name, and have suggested legislation to restrict this. Those interested in such things may need to buy their Genghis beer and Genghis vodka soon, and book their vacation in the Chinggis Khaan ger camp just outside the capital.

#### Mixed Feelings Among Some Foreign Guests?

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¶7. Elsewhere, Genghis Khan's image as merely a brutally bloody conqueror is undergoing a bit of a makeover (partially due to Jack Weatherford's 2004 book), but some of the foreign visitors to the celebrations this summer may have mixed emotions. After all, Chinggis Khaan's unification of the disparate Mongolian tribes in 1206 also organized the

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nation for the conquests abroad that soon ensued. This may not so much trouble the Dutch Crown Prince, who arrives in Mongolia today to begin a four-day visit. The Mongols stopped the westward reach of their conquests in Hungary in 1241 (Weatherford opines they found the European climate and the loot not to their liking). We wonder, however, whether Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, one of the foreign throng slated to be here during Naadam, will be thinking of the Mongol conquest of Russia which began in 1223. The 100 Mongolian soldiers now attached to the multinational force in Iraq may want to mute their own celebrations; Baghdad never quite recovered from the Mongolian armies who ransacked it in 1258.

#### Thanks to U.S. Aid, Mongolian Troops Again Roam World

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¶8. COMMENT: The United States has not yet decided on its own official representative to the celebrations, but our own attitude should be less conflicted. As a young nation ourselves, without the possibly painful memories others may have of Mongolia's beginnings, the U.S. can stay focused firmly on supporting Mongolia as a modern day example of democratic and economic transformation in Asia, and as an emerging peacekeeping contributor whose troops are assisting that same transformation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Kosovo. Mongolia has a proud past which includes Genghis Khan, but it is the U.S.-Mongolia "comprehensive partnership" of shared values and common interests which is central to this country's future.  
END COMMENT.

SLUTZ